

## Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 TEL AV 10377 01 OF 02 142318Z  
ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4877

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE 8041

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 10377

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (MRN & SECTION INFO)

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PBOR MOPS MILI IS LE SY

SUBJECT: THE ISRAELI VIEW OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON

REF: A) TEL AVIV 10235, B) DAMASCUS 4600, C) BEIRUT 4647,  
D) STATE 203291, E) STATE 202292, F) TEL AVIV 9993  
G) TEL AVIV 10336

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELIS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SEPCTRUM ARE  
DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON. SOME  
BELIEVE THAT DAMASCUS HAS A "MASTER PLAN" TO DOMINATE  
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SECRET

PAGE 02 TEL AV 10377 01 OF 02 142318Z

LEBANON. OTHERS THINK THAT SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON  
WILL LEAD TO SUCH DOMINATION ONE DAY AT A TIME. BUT HOWEVER  
IT HAPPENS, AND UNLESS IT IS PREVENTED, THE FINAL OUTCOME  
WILL BE THE SAME. ISRAELIS DO NOT SEE SYRIA'S EFFORTS  
TO BREAK THE PHALANGE AND AHRAR MILITIAS AS ONLY AN  
ALTRUISTIC EFFORT TO REASSERT NATIONWIDE THE BEIRUT GOVERN-  
MENT'S AUTHORITY. RATHER, ISRAELIS ARE CONVINCED THAT SYRIA'S

AIM IS TO DESTROY THE MAJOR OBSTACLE TO DAMASCUS'S HEGEMONY OVER LEBANON--THE MARONITE MILITIAS. WHILE ISRAELIS IN THEIR MORE RHETORICAL OUTBURSTS SPEAK OF A SYRIAN "MASSACARE OF THE CHRISTIANS," THEY DO NOT ALLEGE THAT SYRIA INTENDS WILLY-NILLY TO DESTROY THE MARONITES AS A COMMUNITY. WHAT ISRAELIS DO BELIEVE IS THAT DAMASCUS HAS DECIDED TO GO THE LIMIT TO BREAK THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL POWER OF THE MARONITES. IF MAY CHRISTIAN CIVILIANS MUST DIE IN THE PROCESS, SO BE IT. IN PRACTICE, THE SYRIANS HAVE NOT BEEN TRYING TO "PULL THE TEETH OF THE PHALANGE AND AHRAR," BUT TO TERRIFY AND INTIMIDATE THE MILITIAS' CONSTITUENCY AND SEPARATE THE TWO.

2. THE REPOSE IN THE KNESSET TO DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON HAS BEEN THE COALESCING OF A CONSENSUS IN SUPPORT OF THE GOI'S TAKING FIRM STEPS TO PREVENT TH SYRIANS FROM DESTROYING THE MILITARY CAPABILITY OF THE MARONITE MILITIAS IN LEBANON. IN ADDITION TO THE GEOPOLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS WHICH UNDERLAY ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ISRAELI-MARONITE ALLIANCE, THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT HAS ADDED A HUMANITARIAN CONCERN FOR WHAT IT CONSIDERS ANOTHER MIDDLE EAST MINORITY GROUP UNDER THE GUN. ISRAELIS IDENTIFY WITH THE DIFFICULT SITUATION THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS FIND THEMSELVES IN. WHILE NOT CLAIMING THAT THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHRISTIANS IS WHOLLY SELFLESS, THEY SEE THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE EMBATTLED MARONITES AS NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF. END SUMMARY.

SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TEL AV 10377 01 OF 02 142318Z

3. WE APPRECIATE THE THOUGHTFUL COMMENTS MADE BY AMB. SEELYE IN REF B. WE HAVE USED SOME OF TH SAME ARGUMENTS OURSELVES, MOST RECENTLY WITH WEIZMAN, EITAN AND GAZIT ON AUGUST 11 (REF G). NEVERTHELESS, WE STRESS THAT ISRAELIS ACROSS THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM REMAIN DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON. HERUT HARDLINERS AND LABOR DOVES, NRP ZEALOTS AND MAPAM ATHEISTS ARE ONE ON THIS FOREIGN POLICY ISSUE. SOME ISRAELIS BELIVE THAT SYRIA HAS A MASTER PLAN TO DOMINATE LEBANON. OTHERS BELIVE THAT SYRIAN INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON WILL LEAD TO SUCH DOMINATION A DAY AT A TIME. BUT HOWEVER IT HAPPENS, AND UNLESS IT IS PREVENTED, THE FINAL OUTCOME OF A PAX SYRIANICA IN LEBANON WILL BE THE SAME.

4. ISRAELIS DO NOT SEE SYRIA'S EFFORTS TO BREAK THE PHALANGE AND AHRAR MILITIAS AS ONLY AS ALTRUISTIC EFFORT TO ELIMINATE A MAJOR OBSTICAL TO THE REUNIFICATION OF LEBANON AND THE REASSERTION NATIONWIDE OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE BEIRUT GOVERNMENT, AFTER WHICH THE SYRIANS WILL RETURN HOME AND TAKE THEIR INFLUENCE WITH THEM. RATHER, ISRAELIS ARE CONVINCED THAT SYRIA'S AIM IS TO DESTROY THE MAJOR OBSTA-

CLE TO DAMASCUS' HEGEMONY OVER LEBANON. THOUGHTFUL ISRAELIS  
REALIZE THAT SYRIA DOES NOT WANT TO ABOSRB LEBANON INTO  
A "GREATER SYRIA" AND INHERIT ALL OF ITS PROBLEMS; THEY  
POINT INSTEAD TO SYRIA' DESIRE TO ESTABLISH LEBANON AS A CLIENT  
STATE TO THE DETRIMENT OF ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC POSITION.  
ISRAELIS WOULD AGREE WITH AMB. SEELYE'S OBSERVATION THAT  
"SYRIA NO MORE WANTS TO SEE A PALESTINIAN- OR MUSLIM-  
DOMINATED LEBANON THEN IT DOES A MARONITE-DOMINATED LEBA-  
NON." HOWEVER, THEY WOULD ADD THAT IN THEIR OPINION DAMAS-  
CUS IS AIMING FOR A SYRIAN-DOMINATED LEBANON.

5. ISRAELI LEADERS IN THEIR MORE RHETORICAL OUTBURSTS  
ARE WONT TO SPEAK OF THE SYRIAN "MASSACARE OF THE  
CHRISTIANS." HOWEVER, MOST ISRAELIS, INCLUDING DAYAN IN  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 TEL AV 10377 01 OF 02 142318Z

HIS LESS EMOTIONAL MOMENTS, DO NOT ALLEGE THAT SYRIA IN-  
TENDS WILL-NILLY TO DESTROY THE MARONITES AS A COMMUNITY. RATHER,  
ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT DAMASCUS HAS DECIDED TO GO THE LIMIT  
TO BREAK THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL POWER OF THE MARONITE MILITIAS. IF

MANY CHRISTIAN CIVILIANS MUST DIE IN THE PROCESS, SO BE IT.

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 10377 02 OF 02 160303Z  
ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4878

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN IMMEDIATE

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

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SECRET SECTION 2 OF 2 TEL AVIV 10377

EXDIS

CORRECTED COPY PARA 11

THE SYRIAN TACTIC OF INDISCRIMINATE ARTILLERY AND ROCKET FIRE ON EAST BEIRUT DOES NOTHING TO WEAKEN THE CREDIBILITY OF THIS ARGUMENT. IN PRACTICE, THE SYRIANS HAVE NOT BEEN TRYING TO "PULL THE TEETH OF THE PHALANGE AND AHRAR" BUT TO TERRIFY AND INTIMIDATE THE MILITIAS' MARONITE CONSTITUENCY AND SEPARATE THE TWO. IN ADDITION, THE ARGUMENT THAT THE ALAWITES AND CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN TRADITIONAL ALLIES SEEMS HOLLOW HERE. WHAT MAY BE TRUE INTERNALLY

IN SYRIA IS NOT SEEN AS CARRYING OVER INTO LEBANON. THE ISRAELIS NOTE THAT ASSAD HAD NO PROBLEMS BACKING THE PALESTINIANS AND LEBANESE MUSLIMS AND LEFTISTS FOR THE EARLY PORTION OF THE 1975-76 LEBANESE CIVIL WAR, ALTHOUGH THE SYRIANS SWITCHED TARGETS IN APRIL 1976. IN ANY CASE, ISRAELIS WRYLY SUGGEST THAT MARONITE LEADERS WHO HAVE BEEN UNDER SYRIAN SHELLFIRE IN BEIRUT ALSO FAIL

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SECRET

PAGE 02 TEL AV 10377 02 OF 02 160303Z

TO GET MUCH SUCCOR FROM THE TRADITIONAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN ALAWITES AND CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA.

6. DEVELOPMENTS IN LEBANON HAVE REPEATEDLY COME UP IN OUR RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH KNESSET MEMBERS. YOSEF TAMIR, A LIKUD (LIBERAL) MODERATE, EXPLAINED HOW AT THE AUG. 8 FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY COMMITTEE SESSION NO ONE RPT NO ONE CRITICIZED GOI POLICY ON LEBANON. IN THAT MEETING, FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER ALLON OF THE ALIGNMENT SPOKE OF THE NEED TO PROTECT THE ENCLAVES AND PREVENT A MASSACRE OF THE CHRISTIANS. TAMIR NOTED HOW U.S. CONDEMNATION OF THE SHELLING OF THE LAF BATTALION BY THE CHRISTIAN MILITIA IN THE SOUTH ALONGSIDE AMERICAN FAILURE TO CONDEMN HEAVY SYRIAN SHELLING OF EAST BEIRUT WAS INCOMPREHENSIVE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

7. WE HAVE ALREADY NOTED LABOR MK AND FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF BAR-LEV'S AGREEMENT WITH THE GOI'S POLICY ON THE SOUTH AND ITS REACTION TO SYRIAN PRESSURE ON THE CHRISTIANS IN THE NORTH, I.E., TO GET THE U.S. AND THE U.N. TO STOP THE VIOLENCE (REF F). HE HAS ALSO EXPRESSED TO US HIS BELIEF THAT THE CONSENSUS IN LABOR IS THAT ISRAEL COULD NOT STAND ASIDE IF SYRIAN OR PRO-SYRIAN FORCES MOVED AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS IN THE SOUTH.

8. DANNY ROSOLIO, ALSO A LABOR MK, STRESSED TO US AUG. 11 THAT THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOI AND LABOR PARTY ATTITUDES TOWARD LEBANON. HE ARGUED THAT THE LAF BATTALION AT KAWKABA IS A SURROGATE OF THE SYRIANS AND ITS OBJECTIVE IS NOT TO ASSERT LEBANESE SOVEREIGNTY BUT TO EMASCULATE THE ENCLAVES. HE SEES A

CONNECTION BETWEEN THE PRESSURE ON THE CHRISTIANS IN BEIRUT AND  
THE DESPATCH OF THE BATTALION. ROLOLIO REFERRED TO PUBLIC STATE-

MENTS BY RABIN AND ALLON TO THE EFFECT THAT ALTHOUGH ISRAEL IS NOT  
DIRECTLY INVOLVED, THE GOI MUST MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IT HAS A VITAL  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 TEL AV 10377 02 OF 02 160303Z

INTEREST IN THE LEBANESE SITUATION. ROSOLIO DIE BELIEVE THAT ISREAL  
SHOULD "MOVE" IF SYRIA CONTINUED ITS BLOODLETTING AROUND BEIRUT.

9. IN ANOTHER CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFFS THE SAME DAY, YOSSE SARID,  
A MAVERICK MK ON THE EXTREME DOVISH WING OF THE LABOR PARTY,  
AGREED WITH THE THRUST OF GOI POLICY ON SOUTH LEBANON. HE ACCEPTS  
WITHOUT QUESTION THAT THE LAF BATTALION THAT WAS TO GO TO TIBNIN IS  
A CREATURE OF THE SYRIANS. INDEED, UNLIKE THE GOI, HE THINKS ISRAEL  
SHOULD PREVENT THE LAF MOVEMENT TO THE SOUTH: "I UNDERSTAND WHY  
THE SYRIANS AND THE LEBANESE WANT TO DESTROY THE ENCLAVES. BUT  
IS BEYOND ME WHY THE U.S. ARGUES THAT ISRAEL SHOULD HELP THEM DO IT."

10. IN SUM, THE GREAT MAJORITY OF MK'S SUPPORT FIRM ISRAELI  
STEPS TO PREVENT THE SYRIANS FROM DESTROYING THE MILITARY CAPABILITY  
OF THE MARONITE MILITIAS IN LEBANON. WE NOTE THAT THE GEOPOLITICAL  
CONSIDERATIONS WHICH UNDERLAY THE RABIN GOVERNMENT'S ESTABLISHMENT  
OF THE ISRAELI-MARONITE ALLIANCE HAVE BEEN GIVEN ANOTHER DIMENSION  
BY THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT. THE HUMANITARIAN CONCERN FOR ANOTHER  
MIDDLE EAST MINORITY GROUP UNDER THE MOSLEM GUN HAS BECOME AN  
IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF GOI POLICY TOWARD LEBANON. ISRAELIS IDENTIFY  
WITH THE DIFFICULT SITUATION THE LEBANESE CHRISTIANS FIND THEMSELVES  
IN. THE ISRAELIS DO NOT CLAIM THAT THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE  
CHRISTIANS HAS BEEN WHOLLY ALTRUISTIC AND SELFLESS. AT THE SAME  
TIME, THEY SEE THEIR SUPPORT FOR THE EMBATTLED MARONITES AS  
NOTHING TO BE ASHAMED OF.

11. STATEMENTS SUCH AS THOSE MADE BY SYRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER  
KHADDAM DURING HIS AUGUST 8 VISIT TO NORTH LEBANON (REF C)  
REINFORCE ISRAELI SUSPICIONS. KHADDAM NOTED THAT "WHEN SYRIA  
ASSUMED HER NATIONAL, PATRIOTIC AND FRATERNAL RESPONSIBILITIES  
TOWARDS BROTHER LEBANON, SHE DID NOT ASK FOR THE AUTHORIZATION  
OF ANYONE." FURTHERMORE, HE INDICATED THAT THE SYRIAN ARMY WOULD  
NOT LEAVE LEBANON, EVEN AFTER THE ADF'S MANDATE EXPIRED, IF THE  
SYRIAN ARMY HAD NOT ACCOMPLISHED ITS MISSION. KHADDAM STATED THAT  
"THE ADF (I.E., THE SYRIAN ARMY IN LEBANON) IS LINKED TO A SERIES  
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 04 TEL AV 10377 02 OF 02 160303Z

OF OBJECTIVES WHICH ARE FOR US RELATED TO OUR FRATERNAL COMMITMENT AND ARE THE DETERMINING FACTOR WITH REGARD TO OUR BROTHER LEBANON." ISRAELIS TAKE KHADDAM AT HIS WORD AND BELIEVE THAT THE ABOVE OBJECTIVES ARE THOSE OF SYRIA RATHER THAN OF LEBANON AND ARE AIMED AT ISRAEL.

12. THAT ISRAELI LEADERS ARE NOT NECESSARILY ENTIRELY MISREADING SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON IS SUGGESTED BY COMMENTS MADE BY LEABANESE AMBASSADOR TUENI. HE HAS NOTED THAT WHILE THE SYRIANS MIGHT WANT POLITICAL CONTROL OVER LEBANON, THEY MIGHT SETTLE FOR A POLITICAL-MILITARY AGREEMENT THAT WOULD MAKE LEBANON SECURE FOR SYRIA (REF C). ISRAELIS, FOR A CHANGE, WOULD AGREE WITH HIM RIGHT DOWN THE LINE. TUENI ALSO DESCRIBED SYRIAN OBJECTIVES IN LEBANON AS VARIABLE AND DYNAMIC, WITH DAMASCUS OUT TO GET WHAT IT COULD. "THE LEBANES," ACCORDING TO HIM, "MIGHT ACCEPT A SPECIAL SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON, BUT LEBANON COULD NOT FUNCTION AS A SYRIAN SATELLITE" (REF D). ISRAELIS ARE SKEPTICAL THAT THERE IS ALL THAT MUCH DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO.  
LEWIS

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